DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 273 TM 013 992

AUTHOR Wagner, Jon
TITLE Ethnographic Work and Educational Administration: Reframing Problematics of Educational Research and Practice.
PUB DATE 5 Jun 89
NOTE 37p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrators; *Educational Administration; Educational Anthropology; Educational Research; *Ethnography; Social Science Research; *Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

The problematic relationship between education research and improved practice in the schools is examined in terms of several parallels between the work of school ethnographers and educational administrators. Ethnography includes the perspectives and methods associated with anthropology and sociology through which researchers try to develop an understanding of: (1) how people live and work together; (2) the meanings these people perceive or construct in the activities they share; and (3) the practices by which they affirm, refine, or give life to such meaning. Educational administrators engage in many activities that parallel the activities of school ethnographers. The similarities in tasks include: (1) the dependence of both on knowledge about the culture and structure of schools; (2) the challenge of communicating private information to a larger public; and (3) the need for good ideas about the school in its community context. Although there are contrasts in practice and in structure between the work of administrators and ethnographers, these parallels suggest the value of ethnographic training for educational administrators. Reframing the assumption that research and practice are exclusive fields can promote interaction between researchers and administrators. A 45-item list of references is included. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED312273

ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: REFRAMING PROBLEMATICS OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

JON WAGNER

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Jon Wagner

Division of Education
University of California, Davis

June 5, 1989

TM013998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: REFRAMING PROBLEMATICS OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In his classic ethnography of an elementary school principal, Harry Wolcott noted the following contrast between "being a principal" and "studying the principalship:"

> His [the principal's] commitment was to resolve and thus to eliminate problems, and, when possible, to prevent them from ever happening; mine was to search them out and to keep them constantly in mind in an effort to describe and to understand how principals behave. (1973: 317).

Drawing on my own work as an ethnographer and as an administrator in schools, universities, and educational programs, let me propose two qualifications to the distinction noted by Wolcott[1]: First, some of the skills and perspectives used by educational administrators to "resolve" or "eliminate" problems correspond closely to those used by ethnographers to understand them. Second, administrative work can increase a person's ethnographic understanding of schools and educational programs in

ways that would be very difficult to accomplish through ethnographic research alone.

While these two qualifications have implications for the practice of ethnography in its own right, they take on added significance in light of four contemporary developments in educational discourse: First, an increasing number of books, lectures, workshops and training materials have appeared in recent years to introduce teachers, administrators and other educators to ethnographic concepts and methods. Second, interest in school reform, change, applications to practice, and policy studies has been increasing among educational anthropologists and sociologists (Agyris, 1985). Third the definitions of professional work and professional epistemology articulated by Donald Schon (1983) in terms of the "reflective practitioner" have become increasingly popular among educators. And fourth, interest has been rekindled recently in "action research" (Lewin, 1948) as a vehicle for encouraging change in institutions and in professional practice (Agyris, et al 1985; Gifford and Gabelko, 1987).

Taken together, these four developments both reflect and fuel renewed interest among researchers, policy-makers, teachers and administrators in the problematic relationship of education research to improved practice in the schools (Cremin, 1983).

In this essay I would like to examine this problematic relationship in terms of several parallels between the work of

school ethnographers and educational administrators. These parallels suggest that some forms of ethnographic training could prove valuable to educational administrators. They also challenge time-worn assumptions that the world of research and the world of practice are quite distinct, that researchers and practitioners lack the common ground necessary to support discussions of craft and purpose, or even that they are different kinds of people. This challenge, in turn, helps frame three different interaction effects between research and practice, each of which merits increased ethnographic investigation.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK

As a template for identifying parallels between the work of ethnographers and administrators, let me define ethnography to include those perspectives and methods associated with anthropology and sociology through which researchers try to develop an understanding of (a) how a group of people live and work together, (b) the meanings those people either construct or perceive in the activities they share, and (c) the practices through which they affirm, refine, or give life to such meaning.[2] Let me further propose that the goal of ethnographic perspectives and methods is to develop clear, communicable understandings and interpretations of human behavior within specific contexts of social and cultural

activity. Not only do schools and schooling represent contexts in which such understanding and interpretation are frequently at issue, but specific educational practices are constructed out of social interaction guided by such interpretations (Mehan, 1978).

Traditionally, those data most useful to the ethnographer are generated through direct observations and interviews and made more durable through written note-taking or various forms of "machine-recording" (Erickson, 1982). However, ethnography cannot be defined in terms of technique alone. As Clifford Geertz noted in a quickly canonized essay,

> From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, 'thick description'. (1973: 6)

Geertz's comment distinguishes several aspects of what might be called "ethnographic work" from a more general vision of ethnography proper. In examining parallels and contrasts between ethnographers and administrators, I have found it useful to

distinguish also between ethnographic analysis (what Geertz refers to as the "intellectual effort" of ethnography); the moral and political challenges faced by ethnographers in their work in schools; forms of ethnographic reporting; and strategies for testing ethnographic understanding. While these elements of ethnographic work are closely related, they are separate enough to support examinations of different kinds of reports by ethnographers and of different kinds of ethnographic techniques and analysis in the work of non-ethnographers.[3]

With these distinctions in mind, let me note several respects in which administrators actually have an advantage over ethnographers in developing understanding of schools and schooling. First, administrators can usually spend more time observing in schools than ethnographers, both in the short and long run. By virtue of their positions, they also have access to official and unofficial data that is otherwise hard to come by. In addition, administrators can test the validity of their understanding of schools -- indeed, they must do so continually -- through action and "planned experiments" in the settings they observe. These three resources can all help administrators learn things about schools that ethnographers might like to know but can't, at least not within the constraints of their characteristic research strategies and professional careers.

But how well do administrators use these resources in their efforts to understand schools? In what sense are they engaged in intellectual, practical, or moral pursuits that parallel those of school ethnographers? What elements of social organization support or oppose such parallels, and what implications do they have for the work of educational administrators or for understanding problematic relationships between research and practice in education?

PARALLELS IN PRACTICE

In managing the school or program for which they are responsible, educational administrators spend time and attention investigating how it works as an organization and the patterns that characterize the actions of its members, both individually and collectively. They also try to understand how the organization is seen by other individuals working within it and by members of those external communities that have an interest in its operation.

Some information useful to administrators in developing this kind of understanding can be gleaned from official documentation or management information systems (Guthrie and Reed, 1986). For example, numbers are routinely collected and tabulated for students enrolled, faculty employed, courses offered, dollars available and dollars spent. But these summary indicators of schooling activity

provide little or no information about the expectations, values, concerns or beliefs of actors in the school setting. Nor do they reveal patterns of informal association that complement, contradict or confirm formal organizational structures.

For example, knowing only that all algebra teachers are using the same textbook is inadequate in trying to answer questions about what is actually taught and learned in algebra courses. Similarly the fact that student scores on achievement tests are declining reveals nothing about the process by which that might be occurring. Or, those demographic studies that project changes in the ethnic or racial composition of student and school communities, however accurate they may be, do not provide the kind of information that administrators need to engage new groups of students and their parents in the life of the school.

In general, official statistics fall far short of the information needed by an educational administrator to make good judgments about developing, evaluating or terminating programs or about appointing, supervising, evaluating or assigning personnel. Nor do these data provide an adequate basis for conducting negotiations with supervised staff and with higher level administrators or resolving in-school or school-community conflicts.

To exercise judgment in areas such as these, educational administrators need to understand how a school or program operates

and the meaning that individuals assign to what they do or see within it. Developing this knowledge engages educational administrators in an intellectual effort that comes close to what ethnographers undertake through their own work in schools and other educational settings.[4]

Ethnographic techniques

In some respects, the characteristic methods used by administrators to collect data that can contribute to this kind of understanding also parallel the work of ethnographers. "Management-by-walking-around" creates opportunities for "direct observation." Conversation and consultation provide opportunities for "formal and informal interviewing." Close reading of reports, correspondence and other written materials bears some resemblance to "content analysis."

As an aid to auditing and planning activities, educational administrators also record some data similar to those of interest to ethnographers, including annotated calendars of activities undertaken and planned, agenda and minutes from meetings, even tape-recorded meetings and interviews.

As is true for sociologists and anthropologists, some administrators are more accomplished at these data collection and record-keeping activities than others. However, for both

administrators and ethnographers, recorded observations of this sort constitute rich data about how a school or program works.

Moral and political challenges

Through their work in schools, both ethnographers and administrators also confront political and moral dilemmas. Some of these are generated through loyalties to competing groups. Others stem from close work with vulnerable populations, or from conflict between individuals and groups over standards of behavior, allocation of resources, and opportunities for personal or public expression.

Individual ethnographers and administrators may frame these moral and political dilemmas in idiosyncratic terms. However, some structural parallels seem to apply as well. As the anthropologist Dell Hymes has noted about the "relationship of ethnography":

> This is not merely an instrumental relationship, but a moral one. If there is to be a future for anthropology in a democratic world, the ethnographic relationship must be developed as a mutuality not only of trust, but also of knowledge (1974: 53). [emphasis added]

While Hymes' comment refers to ethnographic research, it captures as well one of the core moral and political challenges faced by

educational administrators in their work in schools and school communities.

STRUCTURAL PARALLELS

The parallels noted above do not reflect efforts by administrators to imitate ethnographers. Rather, educational administrators engage in ethnographic-like activities because of structural parallels between the tasks they face and those faced by school ethnographers. The first of these is the dependence of both administrators and ethnographers on knowledge about the culture and structure of schools, information that is holistic in scope and that accurately portrays the "insider" or emic point of view. As Jeff Patterson concluded from his study of first-year principals,

> The most important skill needed by the first-year principals was a specific understanding of the larger organization in which they worked -- the school system -- and the organization that they managed, or their schools. This understanding encompasses knowledge of the school's curriculum, the various programs offered by the school, the students and their unique needs and differences, the staff members and their particular strengths and weaknesses, the community and its expectations, the district office staff and their expectations, and the

various procedures involved in a public organization and bureaucracy. (1985: 24)

While ethnographers need this kind of "specific understanding" to prepare written ethnographies, educational administrators need it to address the challenges they face in their work, many of which involve responsibilities to mediate between different constituencies or "stake-holders" in the school or program. For example, state funds are awarded to a school to support special services for students, and the administrator must work with staff to design programs that are responsive to local needs and consistent with the state guidelines. Or, the administrator is charged with restoring order and tranquility in a school beset by student disruptions, a teacher's strike, or a catastrophic decline in funding. Or, nearby schools are being closed, or opened, and the administrator must work with parents, district staff, and teachers to negotiate an equitable and effective transfer of responsibilities and resources.[5]

Because "specific understanding" is necessary for both ethnographers and administrators to do their work, they both put in long hours trying to develop it, largely through the forms of direct observation and interviewing noted above and through the analysis of documents, artifacts, and rituals.

Ethnographic work
and educational administration

A second structural parallel is the challenge of communicating private information to a larger public. Both ethnographers and administrators receive valuable but confidential information from individuals about schools and educational programs. To exercise good judgement, administrators need to refer to these data in planning and evaluating programs. But to keep receiving it, they need to respect the confidence in which it was offered. Anthropologists handle this problem in part by reporting to different audiences than those studied or by writing in terms that make little sense to the subjects of study (Georges and Jones, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988).

While these luxuries are not generally available to educational administrators, administrators can draw upon two other techniques used by anthropologists. The first is the preparation of anonymous "case materials" or "composites" based on information obtained from individuals, a staple ingredient of both ethnographic (Van Maanen, 1988; Yin, 1984) and administrative presentations. In the hands of a skilled administrator, information of this sort is presented through invocations such as the following: "Several [students, teachers, parents, board members, etc.] have reported that 'X' is a problem." Or, "We have had three cases now in which 'X' happened to some of our better students. Therefore. . . " Or, "I know from having spoken with several members of the faculty that this proposal will not be supported in the school."

A second device through which valuable but confidential information can be incorporated within administrative decision-making is the "inter-locking interview." In this case, information obtained from one individual is used to inform questions asked of another, without revealing the identity of the first person. Agreements and understandings arrived at with individuals through this kind of inter-locking inquiry represent the homework behind many public expressions of consensus that administrators manage to generate within schools and educational programs. A decision announced with confidence by a school administrator, at least one that sticks, is almost invariably grounded in a series of such directed interviews, a popular term for which is "consultation."

A third parallel is the need for good contextual ideas about the school and its relationship to larger community and schooling institutions. Neither the ethnographer nor the educational administrator can be content to simply collect "good data." Ethnographers have to analyze such data for its implications about how schools work in general, the administrator for how one school or program works in particular. For the ethnographer these implications are framed in terms of different models, theories, or concepts, all of which in turn help define the significance of individual observations. These models, theories and concepts are important to the administrator as well, not only in organizing data

about the school, but also in defining a context for leadership in which decisions can be made about individuals and programs.

CONTRASTS IN PRACTICE

In contrast to the parallels noted above regarding intellectual effort, techniques and moral challenges, reporting conventions and strategies for testing ethnographic understanding differ markedly for ethnographers and administrators.

In terms of ethnographic reporting, for example, ethnographers differ from administrators by writing ethnographies and trying to get them published. They also present oral reports to other ethnographers, address their remarks almost exclusively to audiences outside the school community, and frame their reports to reflect interpretive closure.

Administrators do not write ethnographies, nor do they present reports to ethnographers -- unless interviewed by one. Most reporting by administrators is oral, iterative, and framed within ongoing routines of their work. Their written reports could go beyond documenting institutional compliance or "accomplishments" to exemplify ethnographic understanding, but they rarely do.

Administrators and ethnographers also differ in terms of their efforts to confirm or disconfirm ethnographic understanding. For ethnographers, confirmation is tied to systematic strategies for

observing and recording data, familiarity with comparative accounts of related phenomena in other settings prepared by other ethnographers, theory coherence, and opportunities to reflect on field work after withdrawing from the field setting itself. In contrast, administrators are more likely to trust cumulative accounts of phenomena in the same setting, "natural experiments" that empirically test understanding through action, political coherence, and opportunities to reflect within the field setting on leadership and decision-making.

CONTRASTS IN STRUCTURE

In much the same way that parallel practices reflect parallel challenges faced by administrators and ethnographers, contrasting practices reflect contrasting challenges.

Reporting conventions

For example, for ethnographers to receive professional recognition and rewards for time spent in the field, they have to prepare published ethnographic reports. Field notes, oral tellings, and good deeds -- however valuable they may be in other contexts -- do not in themselves meet expectations of the academic community in which ethnographers are employed. Failing to produce such reports signifies that the anthropologist or sociologist

failed to complete his or her ethnographic work, credit for which is identified with the quality and interpretive closure of the report itself. Because of these career exigencies, ethnographers are far more likely than administrators to describe their understanding of schools through published reports within the ethnographic literature.

For administrators, preparing published ethnographic reports is incidental to jobs and careers. Administrative success with a school or program is what brings them professional recognition and salary. As a result, their interest and commitment to preparing ethnographic reports rely on personal rather than institutional incentives, and it comes as no surprise that most administrators chose not to prepare such reports at all.

However, many administrators do pursue an ethnographic interest in questions about schools and schooling. And, while some of these could be investigated within the constraints of conventional ethnographic field work, others could not. For example, it is not unusual for administrators to be engaged with issues -- such as those related to individual development or planned organizational change -- that can only be examined through five or ten years of direct observation within the same or related field settings. While this span of time far exceeds what most anthropologists can give, it comes naturally to those working as administrators in the schools.[6]

Ethnographic work
and educational administration

Another point of contrast with ethnographers is that for administrators, "interpretive closure" in school settings frequently serves as an obstacle to developing or maintaining interpersonal trust, encouraging collective action, or mobilizing political support. On these grounds alone, the ethnographic-like work of administrators is far more likely to be reported within a piece-meal, iterative, and continuing dialogue with other school members than it is to be wrapped up in a coherent, comprehensive and culminating essay, article or book.

Some administrators are extremely skilled in using such dialogue to illuminate larger educational issues. In doing so, they exhibit an understanding of schools in which individual problems reflect larger structural concerns and the particulars of individual conduct reveal more general patterns of social and cultural behavior. However, while the ability of some administrators to provide intellectual leadership of this sort reflects both what Mills (1959) referred to as "the sociological imagination" and the kind of knowledge about schooling that ethnographers seek in their own work and in the work of their colleagues, evidence of this ability rarely travels well beyond the school-site or institution within which the administrator works.

Ethnographic work
and educational administration

Testing understanding through leadership

As noted by Chris Agyris and his associates (Agyris, et al, 1985: 33), both scientists and practitioners test the value of their knowledge through discourse within distinctive communities of practice. Typically, these tests involve efforts by individuals to exercise leadership in discourse with other community members.

So too with school ethnographers and educational administrators. However, contrasts between the in which each tries to exercise leadership augment related contrasts in reporting conventions already noted.

For educational administrators, leadership roles are exercised within the same school settings that serve as field sites for continuing investigation. As a result, these roles reflect a recursive school-based process of developing understanding, using understanding as a basis for action that affirms, challenges or changes circumstances, refining understanding through such work, and so on. In this respect, administrative leadership involves both an application of understanding to practice and a "natural experiment" for testing the validity of understanding within practice (D'Andrade, 1986) and with other practitioners in the school community.

For school ethnographers, leadership roles are usually exercised at great remove from settings for field research itself. Recursive elements of these roles involve developing understanding,

using such understanding as a basis for communicating with other researchers, refining understanding through such communication, and so on. In this respect, leadership roles for ethnographers are based on articulating understanding within the terms of shared inquiry with other members of a research community.

Thus, while the work of both ethnographers and administrators reflects some interdependence of inquiry and action, the locus of such interdependence for the administrator is the school, for the ethnographer, the ethnographic research community.

The school-based interdependence of understanding and practice for administrators is frequently regarded by ethnographers and other social scientists to compromise the credibility of administrators' knowledge of schools and educational programs. Similarly, the research-community-based interdependence of understanding and practice for ethnographers is frequently regarded by administrators to limit ethnographers' understanding of schools and educational programs. However, while these concerns about the parochial perspectives of both ethnographers and administrators are legitimate, recursive elements of inquiry and action can <u>expand</u> knowledge for each as well as truncate or distort it.[7]

ETHNOGRAPHIC TRAINING FOR ADMINISTRATORS

The parallels noted above suggest that greater familiarity with ethnographic concepts, techniques, and values might help educational administrators address some of the problems they encounter in their work. These parallels also suggest that efforts to develop this kind of familiarity can build upon ethnographic-like activities in which administrators are already engaged.

For example, administrators can quickly put to use skills in interviewing, analysis of interview transcripts, questionnaire design, systematic observation and note-taking. In exercising leadership in schools, they can also benefit from developing greater familiarity with ethnographic models of the intellectual effort in which they are already engaged. Given their immediate value to administrative work in schools and other educational settings, explicit efforts to develop these skills and familiarity represent a promising strategy for strengthening connections between ethnographic understanding and educational practice.

However, the contrasts noted above suggest that to be useful to administrators, ethnographic training should focus not on traditional forms of ethnographic reporting but on the distinctive audience, media and discourse processes of local school communities. Such training could encourage administrators to communicate more clearly their ethnographic understanding in

chairing meetings, conducting "work sessions" with faculty and staff, writing memos to individuals and groups, speaking before school boards, and completing routine assignments. Traditional forms of ethnographic reporting are of limited value in such situations.[8]

Finally, to encourage what Hymes called the "mutuality of trust and knowledge," administrators could be encouraged to practice ethnographic work in collaboration with the teachers, students, parents, and other administrators with whom they work. Along these lines, a host of studies could be proposed through which educational administrators can collaborate with their school-site colleagues to increase both practical and theoretical knowledge about school settings. To develop increased understanding of their own work, for example, administrators can "shadow" each other and undertake reflective analysis of follow-up in-depth interviews (Barnett and Long, 1986). Or, administrators can support students, faculty and parents in conducting community studies and other forms of local ethnographic investigation. Administrators can also play a valuable role in encouraging faculty or student projects that investigate classroom instruction and course assignments.

REFRAMING THE "PROBLEM" OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In addition to suggesting the potential value of ethnographic training to educational administrators, the parallels noted above between ethnographic work and educational administration challenge popular assumptions that researchers engage exclusively in research and practitioners exclusively in practice. Wolcott's comments about the contrasting "commitments" of the ethnographer and the administrator reflect an occupational or institutional version of this apparent dichotomy. Howard Becker has offered a similar line of analysis (1983). Other versions have been articulated by Seymour Sarason (1982) in terms of the "two cultures" of the university and the school, and, more recently, by Richard Shavelson (1988) in terms of the contrasting "mind frames" of researchers and practitioners.

In the preceding pages I have tried to outline some of the ways in which this assumption of dichotomous variation is inadequate to describe the work of educational administrators and school ethnographers. If only to practice their craft as administrators, educational administrators have to do some of the things that field researchers do. Similarly, though space does not permit describing these in detail, researchers practicing their own craft must perform work similar to that performed by teachers or

administrators do (e.g., administer grants, teach their research through writing and publication, etc.)

By ignoring these functional parallels and focusing on the contrasts alone, conventional wisdom about research and practice confounds three distinct interaction effects: First, interaction effects can occur between the work of those individuals and groups of individuals who participate in education research communities and the work of those who participate as teachers and administrators in the schools. Understanding these effects requires better answers to questions about the kinds of research reports teachers and administrators read, see or hear; the migration of research concepts and problems of practice within and across institutions through print, folklore, policy discourse, and so on; and the forms of collective action in which researchers, teachers and administrators perform complementary functions.

Second, interaction effects can occur between particular populations of educational researchers, teachers and administrators. Inquiry here can be framed by questions about social interaction and communication between individuals who work in positions institutionally defined in terms of research, teaching, or administration.

Third, interaction effects can occur between the way an individual conducts research activities and the way that same

individual conducts activities involving teaching or administration.

Recent interest in the positive value of this third kind of effect has focused on programs of "teacher-research" (Myers, 1985; Goswami and Stillman, 1987; Miller, 1988; Cross, 1988) and on more general efforts to re-think professional practice (Schon, 1983). However, to understand these effects better, we need to know more about the personal and professional meaning that individuals attach to their own research activities and to their own practice as teachers and administrators. Lacking such knowledge, we tend to focus on the ironies -- educational researchers who are lousy educators, or inquiring practitioners who discredit the value of research. But what patterns and processes are at work in creating or supporting these apparent contradictions? How does an individual's orientation towards seeking knowledge support or interfere with applying it? How does routinization of either inquiry or practice encourage or defeat its larger purpose?

Understanding the three interaction effects noted above is a precondition for designing effective programs of applied education research. This kind of understanding could be advanced through detailed ethnographic investigations of how researchers and practitioners perceive and perform their work, both individually and collectively. However, the most valuable object of these investigations will not be a single, abstract relationship between

educational research and practice, or between researchers and practitioners. Rather, it will be a set of problematic social and cultural relationships defined by the research-like and practice-like activities in which researchers, practitioners and others engage in different educational settings and at different times.

By reframing the abstract problem of education research and practice as a set of problematic but observable relationships between how people act within particular social and cultural domains, Wolcott's exemplary commitment to "searching out problems and keeping them constantly in mind," appears anew as a valuable orientation, not only for school ethnographers, but for a more inclusive community of discourse in which ethnographers and educational administrators might participate together.

NOTES

1.

Published reports of this ethnographic work in schools and educational programs include: Identifying Reference (1979; 1983; 1986; 1987; 1989).

2.

My own thinking about these issues has benefitted from rich professional discourse during the past ten years or so about ethnography as it applies specifically to education. Frederick Erickson's superb overview (1986) describes some of these developments and complements earlier statements about school-focused ethnographic research by LeCompte and Goetz (1984); Green and Wallat (1981); Miles and Huberman (1984); and Tikunoff and Ward (1980). These in turn build upon a more general literature of field observation in the social sciences as described by Lofland (1976); Schatzman and Strauss (1974); Spradley and McCurdy (1972); Radcliffe-Brown (1958); Wax (1971); Whyte (1984); and others.

3. In recent years, increased attention has been given to ethnographic reporting as an object of inquiry in its own right (Becker, 1986a, 1986b; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). This attention complements proposals to expand the range and vary the format of ethnographic reports to include the "memorandum" (Wolcott, 1984); the "letter" and the "conversation" (Clandinin, 1986); and the analytical "dialogue," "parody," and "invention" (Mulkay, 1985).

4.

These efforts can correspond closely to the four core values that David Fetterman (1984: 23) has identified for ethnographic work in educational settings: phenomenology, holism, nonjudgmental orientation, and contextualization.

5.

In his preface to Wolcott's study of the elementary school principal, George Spindler notes that these responsibilities may be peculiar to American schools:

> Having carried out studies in elementary schools in the United States and also in Germany, we feel that this [the mediating role of the principal] is a product of the

> American situation. There is no principal in the German elementary school, and the community in all or any of its parts does not expect there to be. Mediation is less significant because the community is organized more hierarchically, and the lines of authority and responsibility are clearer. (1973: viii-ix)

6.

One manifestation of interest in such questions is "the book I ought to write," a common locution in administrative discourse. However, the same absence of reporting demands that makes possible long-term inquiry also allows inquiry to go unreported beyond the school itself, and far too few of these "books" have actually been written.

7.

The "detached" orientation of most ethnographers involves a trade-off within efforts to understand the schools. On the one hand, by helping ethnographers experience non-partisanship in field settings it may generate insights not otherwise available. On the other hand, it may deprive ethnographers of opportunities to test within the context of action their understanding of a school setting (Agyris, 1985; D'Andrade, 1986).

. . .

Ethnographic work
and educational administration

For several thoughtful portraits of the tensions and dilemmas experienced by field researchers who complement their interest in understanding with a parallel interest in direct action, see Whyte (1984).

8.

As Frederick Erickson has noted:

> In applied research, and especially in reporting to local audiences of those studied, the single report in the form of a monograph-length ethnography is probably obsolete. Multiple reports of varying length, each designed to address the specific interest of a specific audience, are usually more appropriate. Nor is writing the only medium of reporting. In the local setting oral reports at meetings, and mixing oral and written reporting in workshops, can be effective ways to teach the findings. (1986: 156).

REFERENCES:

Agyris, Chris and Schon, Donald A. (1974). Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Agyris, Chris; Putnam, Robert; and Smith, Diana McLain. (1985). Action science. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Agyris, Dianne. (1985). The ethnographic approach to intervention and fundamental change, pp. 158-189 in Agyris, et. al., Action Science. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barnett, Bruce, and Long, Claudia. (1986). Peer-assisted leadership: Principals learning from each other. Phi Delta Kappan, 67, 672-675.

Becker, Howard S. (1983). Studying urban schools. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 14, 99-108.

_____. (1986a). Telling about society, pp. 121-136 in Doing things together: selected papers. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

_____. (1986b). Writing for social scientists. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Clandinin, Djean. (1986). Classroom practice: Teacher images in action. London: Falmer Press.

Clifford, James, and Marcus, George, (Eds.). (1986). Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cross, Pat. (1988). In search of zippers. Bulletin: American Association of Higher Education, 40 (June) 3-7.

D'Andrade, Roy. (1986). Three scientific world views and the covering law model, pp. 19-41 in Donald W. Fiske and Richard A. Shweder, (Eds.). Metatheory in social science. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Erickson, Frederick. (1982). The analysis of audiovisual records as a primary data source, pp. 213-232 in A. Grimshaw (Ed.), Sound-image records in social interaction research. Special issue of the Journal of Sociological Methods and Research, 11.

_____. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching, pp. 119-161 in Merlin Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching: Third edition. New York: Macmillan.

Fetterman, David. (1984). Ethnography in education research: The dynamics of diffusion, pp. 21-36 in David Fetterman (Ed.), Ethnography in educational evaluation. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture, pp. 3-32 in The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Georges, Robert A., and Jones, Michael O. (1980). People studying people: The human element in fieldwork. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Gifford, Bernard R. and Gabelko, Nina Hersh. (1987). Linking practice-sensitive researchers to research-sensitive practitioners. Education and Urban Society, 19: 368-388.

Goswami, Dixie and Stillman, Peter R. (1987). Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change. Upper Montclair, NJ. Boynton/Cooke.

Green, Judith, and Wallet, Cynthia. (1981). Ethnography and language in educational settings. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Guthrie, James W. and Reed, Rodney J. (1986). Educational administration and policy: Effective leadership for American schools. Englewocd Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall.

Hymes, Dell. (1969). Re-inventing anthropology. New York: Random House.

Jacob, Evelyn. (1988). Clarifying qualitative research. Educational Research, 17: 16-24.

LeCompte, Margaret D., and Goetz, Judith P. (1984). Ethnographic data collection in evaluation research, pp. 37-59 in David Fetterman (Ed.), Ethnography in educational evaluation. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lofland, John. (1976). Doing social life: The qualitative study of human interaction in natural settings. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Lewin, Kurt. (1948). Action research and minority problems. in Kurt Lewin, Resolving social conflicts. New York: Harper and Row.

Mehan, Hugh. (1978). Structuring school structure. Harvard Educational Review, 48, 32-64.

Miles, Matthew B., and Huberman, A. Michael. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Miller, Lynne. Unlikely beginnings: The district office as a starting point for developing a professional culture for teaching, pp. 167-184 in Ann Lieberman, (Ed.), Building a professional culture in schools. New York: Teachers College Press.

Mills, C. Wright. (1959). The sociological imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mulkay, Michael. (1985). The word and the world: Explorations in the form of sociological analysis. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Myers, Miles. (1985). The teacher-researcher: How to study writing in the classroom. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Patterson, Jeff. (1985). Managing and using time: First-year principal version. Thrust. 15, 24-25.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1958). Method in social anthropology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sarason, Seymour B. (1982). The culture of the school and the problem of change. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Schatzman, Leonard, and Strauss, Anselm L. (1973). Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Schon, Donald. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. New York: Basic Books.

Shavelson, Richard J. (1988). Contributions of educational research to policy and practice: Constructing, challenging, changing cognition. Educational Researcher, 17: 7, 4-11.

Spindler, George. (1973). Foreword, pp. vii - ix in Harry Wolcott, The man in the principal's office: An ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spradley, James P., and McCurdy, David W. (1972). The cultural experience: Ethnography in a complex society. Chicago: Science Research Associates.

Van Maanen, John. (1988). Tales of the Field. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wax, Rosalie. (1971). Doing fieldwork: Warnings and advice. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Whyte, William Foote. (1984). Learning from the field: A guide from experience. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Wolcott, Harry F. (1973). The man in the principal's office: An ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

_____. (1984). Ethnographers sans ethnography: The evaluation compromise, pp. 177-210 in David Fetterman, (Ed.) Ethnography in educational evaluation. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, Robert K. (1984). Case study research: Design and methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Zigarmi, Drea, and Lindquist, Alexa, (Eds.). (1980). Ethnographic techniques in education. A special issue of Education and Urban Society, 12, 259-399.